INITIALS ONLY

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

AUTHOR OF "THE LEAVENWORTH CASE" "THE FILIGREE BALL" "THE HOUSE OF THE WHISPERING PINES"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES W. ROSSER

SYNOPSIS.

George Anderson and wife see a remarkable looking man come out of the Clermont hotel, look around furtively, wash his hands in the snow and pass on. Commotion attracts them to the Clermont, where it is found that the beautiful Miss Edith Challoner has fallen dead. Anderson describes the man he saw wash his hands in the snow. The hotel manager declares him to be Orlando Brotherson. Physicians find that Miss Challoner was stabbed and not shot, which seems to clear Brotherson of suspicion. Gryce, an aged detective, and Sweetwater, his assistant, take up the case. They believe Miss Challoner stabbed herself. A paper cutter found near the scene of tragedy is believed to be the weapon used. Mr. Challoner tells of a batch of letters found in his daughter's desk, signed "O. B." All are love letters except one which shows that the writer was displeased. This letter was signed by Orlando Brotherson. Anderson goes with Sweetwater to identify Brotherson, who is to address a meeting of anarchists. The place is raided by the police and Brotherson escapes without being identified. Brotherson is found living in a tenement under the name of Dunn. He is an inventor. Brotherson tells the coroner of his acquaintance with Miss Challoner and how she repulsed him with scorn when he offered her his love. Sweetwater recalls the mystery of the murder of a washerwoman in which some details were similar to the Challoner affair.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

Only the Dunn of today seemed to have all his wits about him, while the huge fellow who brushed so rudely by me on that occasion had the peculiar look of a man struggling with horror or some other grave agitation. This was not surprising, of course, under the circumstances. I had met more than one man and woman in those halls who had worn the same look; but none of them had put up a sign on his door that he had left for New York and would not be back till 6:30, and then changed his mind so suddenly that he was back in the tenement at three, sharing the curiosity and the terrors of its horrified inmates.

"But the discovery, while possibly suggestive, was not of so pressing a nature as to demand instant action; and more immediate duties coming up, I let the matter slip from my mind, to be brought up again the next day, you may well believe, when all the circumstances of the death at the Clermont came to light and I found myself confronted by a problem very nearly the counterpart of the one then occupying me.

"But I did not see any real connection between the two cases, until, in my hunt for Mr. Brotherson, I came upon the following facts: that he was not always the gentleman he appeared; that the apartment in which he was supposed to live was not his own but a friend's named Conway; and that he was only there by spells. When he was there, he dressed like a prince and it was while so clothed he ate his meals in the cafe of the Hotel Clermont.

"Of Brotherson himself I saw nothing. He had come to Mr. Conway's apartment the night before—the night of Miss Challoner's death, you understand—but had remained only long enough to change his clothes. Where he went afterwards is unknown to Mr. Conway, nor can he tell us when to look for his return. When he does show up, my message will be given him, etc., etc. I have no fault to find with Mr. Conway.

"You have heard how Brotherson bore himself at the coroner's office; what his explanations were and how completely they fitted in with the preconceived notions of the inspector and the district attorney. In consequence, Miss Challoner's death is looked upon as a suicide. A weapon was in her hand—she impulsively used it, and another deplorable suicide was added to the melancholy list. Had I put in my oar at the conference held in the coroner's office; had I recalled to Doctor Heath the curious case of Mrs. Spotts, and then identified Brotherson as the man whose window fronted hers from the opposite tenement, a diversion might have been created and the outcome been different. But I feared the experiment. I'm not sufficiently in with the chief as yet, nor yet with the inspector. They might not have called me a fool—you may; but that's different—and they might have listened, but it would doubtless have been with an air I could not have held up against, with that fellow's eyes fixed mockingly on mine. For he and I are pitted for a struggle, and I do not want to give him the advantage of even a momentary triumph. He's the most complete master of himself of any man I ever met, and it will take the united brain and resolution of the whole force to bring him to book—if he ever is brought to book, which I doubt. What do you think about it?"

"That you have given me an antidote against old age," was the ringing and unexpected reply, as the thoughtful, half-puzzled aspect of the old man yielded impulsively to a burst of his early enthusiasm. "If we can get a good grip on the thread you speak of, and can work ourselves along by it, though it be by no more than inch at a time, we shall yet make our way through this labyrinth of undoubted crime and earn for ourselves a triumph which will make some of these raw and inexperienced young fellows about us stare. Sweetwater, coincidences are possible. We run upon them every day. But coincidence in crime! that should make work for a detective, and we are not afraid of work. There's my hand for my end of the business."

"And here's mine."

Next minute the two heads were closer than ever together, and the business had begun.

CHAPTER XIII.

Time, Circumstances, and a Villain's Heart.

"Our first difficulty is this. We must prove motive. Now, I do not think it will be so very hard to show that this Brotherson cherished feelings of revenge towards Miss Challoner. But I have to acknowledge right here and now that the most skilful and vigorous pumping of the janitor and such other tenants of the Hicks street tenement as I have dared to approach, fails to show that he has ever held any communication with Mrs. Spotts, or even knew of her existence until her remarkable death attracted his attention."

"Humph! We will set that down, then, as so much against us."

"The next, and this is a bitter pill too, is the almost insurmountable difficulty already recognized of determining how a man, without approaching his victim, could manage to inflict a mortal stab in her breast. No cloak of complete invisibility has yet been found, even by the cleverest criminals. But there's an answer to everything, and I'm sure there's an answer to this. Remember his business. He's an inventor, with startling ideas. Oh, I know that I am prejudiced; but wait and see! Miss Challoner was well rid of him even at the cost of her life."

"She loved him. Even her father believes that now. Some lately discovered letters have come to light to prove that she was by no means so heart free as he supposed. One of her friends, it seems, has also confided to him that once, while she and Miss Challoner were sitting together, she caught Miss Challoner in the act of scribbling capitals over a sheet of paper. They were all B.'s with the exception of here and there a nearly turned O, and when her friend twitted her with her fondness for these two letters, and suggested a pleasing monogram, Miss Challoner answered, 'O B. (transferring the letters, as you see) are the initials of the finest man in the world.'"

"Gosh! Has he heard this story?"

"I don't think so. It was told me in confidence."

"Told you, Mr. Gryce? Pardon my curiosity."

"By Mr. Challoner."

"Oh! by Mr. Challoner."

"He is greatly distressed at having the disgraceful suggestion of suicide attached to his daughter's name. He sent for me in order to inquire if anything could be done to reinstate her in public opinion. He evidently does not like Brotherson either."

"And what—what did you—say?" asked Sweetwater, with a halting utterance and his face full of thought.

"I simply quoted the latest authority on hypnotism, that no person even in hypnotic sleep could be influenced by another to do what was antagonistic to his natural instincts."

"Latest authority. That doesn't mean a final one. Supposing that it was hypnotism! But that wouldn't account for Mrs. Spotts' death. Her wound certainly was not a self-inflicted one."

"How can you be sure?"

"There was no weapon found in the room, or in the court. The snow was searched and the children too. No weapon, Mr. Gryce, not even a paper-cutter. Besides—but how did Mr. Challoner take what you said? Was he satisfied with this assurance?"

"He had to be. I didn't dare to hold out any hope based on so unsubstantial a theory. But the interview had this effect upon me. If the possibility remains of fixing guilt elsewhere than on Miss Challoner's inconsiderate impulse, I am ready to devote any amount of time and strength to the work. To see this grieving father relieved from the worst part of his burden is worth some effort and now you know why I have listened so eagerly to you. Sweetwater, I will go with you to the superintendent. We may not gain his attention and again we may. If we don't—but we won't cross that bridge prematurely. When will you be ready for this business?"

"I must be at headquarters tomorrow."

"Good, then let it be tomorrow. A taxicab, Sweetwater. The subway for the young. I can no longer manage the stairs."

CHAPTER XIV.

A Concession.

"It is true; there seems to be something extraordinary in the coincidence."

Thus Mr. Brotherson, in the presence of the inspector.

"But that is all there is to it," he easily proceeded. "I knew Miss Challoner and I have already said how much and how little I had to do with her death. The other woman I did not know at all; I did not even know her name. A prosecution based on grounds so flimsy as those you advance would savor of persecution, would it not?"

The inspector, surprised by this unexpected attack, regarded the speaker with an interest rather augmented than diminished by his boldness. The smile with which he had uttered these concluding words yet lingered on his lips, lighting up features of a mold too suggestive of command to be associated readily with guilt. That the impression thus produced was favorable, was evident from the tone of the inspector's reply:

"We have said nothing about prosecution, Mr. Brotherson. We hope to avoid any such extreme measures, and that we may the more readily do so, we have given you this opportunity to make such explanations as the situation, which you yourself have characterized as remarkable, seems to call for."

"I am ready. But what am I called upon to explain? I really cannot see, sir."

"You can tell us why with your seeming culture and obvious means, you choose to spend so much time in a second-rate tenement like the one in Hicks street."

Again that chill smile preceding the quiet answer:

"Have you seen my room there? It is piled to the ceiling with books. When I was a poor man, I chose the abode suited to my purse and my passion for first-rate reading. I have never seen the hour when I felt like moving that precious collection. Besides, I am a man of the people. I have led—I may say that I am leading—a double life; but of neither am I ashamed, nor have I cause to be. Love drove me to ape the gentleman in the halls of the Clermont; a broad human interest in the work of the world, to live as a fellow among the mechanics of Hicks street."

"But why make use of one name as a gentleman of leisure and quite a different one as the honest workman?"

"Ah, there you touch upon my real secret. I have a reason for keeping my identity quiet till my invention is completed."

"A reason connected with your anarchistic tendencies?"

"Possibly." But the word was uttered in a way to carry little conviction. "I am not much of an anarchist," he now took the trouble to declare, with a careless lift of his shoulders.

"Gryce, You Shall Have Your Way."

"We are glad to hear it, Mr. Dunn. Physical overthrow carries more than the immediate sufferer with it."

"We have no wish," continued the inspector, "to probe too closely into concerns seemingly quite removed from the main issue. You will probably be anxious to explain away a discrepancy between your word and your conduct, which has come to our attention. You were known to have expressed the intention of spending the afternoon of Mrs. Spotts' death in New York and were supposed to have done so, yet you were certainly seen in the crowd which invaded that rear building at the first alarm. Are you conscious of possessing a double, or did you fail to cross the river as you expected to?"

"I am glad this has come up." The tone was one of self-congratulation which would have shaken Sweetwater sorely had he been admitted to this unofficial examination. "I did mean to go to New York and I even started on my walk to the bridge at the hour mentioned. But I got into a small crowd on the corner of Fulton street, in which a poor devil who had robbed a vendor's cart of a few oranges, was being hustled about. There was no policeman within sight, and so I busied myself there for a minute paying for the oranges and dragging the poor wretch away into an alley, where I could have the pleasure of seeing him eat them. When I came out of the alley the small crowd had vanished, but a big one was collecting up the street very near my home. I always think of my books when I see anything suggesting fire, and naturally I returned, and equally naturally, when I heard what had happened, followed the crowd into the court and so up to the poor woman's doorway. But my curiosity satisfied, I returned at once to the street and went to New York as I had planned."

"Do you mind telling us where you went in New York?"

"Not at all. I went shopping. I wanted a certain very fine wire, for an experiment I had on hand, and I found it in a little shop on Fourth avenue. If I remember rightly, the name over the door was Grippus. Its oddity struck me."

There was nothing left to the inspector but to dismiss him. He had answered all questions willingly, and with a countenance inexpressive of guile. He even indulged in a parting shot on his own account, as full of frank acceptance of the situation as it was fearless in its attack. As he halted in the doorway before turning his back upon the room, he smiled for the third time as he quietly said:

"I have ceased visiting my friend's apartment in upper New York. If you ever want me again, you will find me amongst my books."

He was half-way out the door, but his name quickly spoken by the inspector drew him back.

"Anything more?" he asked.

The inspector smiled.

"You are a man of considerable analytic power, as I take it, Mr. Brotherson. You must have decided long ago how this woman died."

"Is that a question, inspector?"

"You may take it as such."

"Then I will allow myself to say that there is but one common-sense view to take of the matter. Miss Challoner's death was due to suicide; so was that of the washerwoman. But there I stop. As for the means—the motive—such mysteries may be within your province but they are totally outside mine! God help us all! The world is full of misery. Again I wish you good-day."

The air seemed to have lost its vitality and the sun its sparkle when he was gone.

"Now, what do you think, Gryce?"

The old man rose and came out of his corner.

"This: That I'm up against the hardest proposition of my lifetime. Nothing in the man's appearance or manner evinces guilt, yet I believe him guilty. I must. Not to, is to strain probability to the point of breakage. But how to reach him is a problem and one of no ordinary nature. If he is not innocent as the day, he's as hard as unquarried marble. He might be confronted with reminders of his crime at every turn without weakening or showing by loss of appetite or interrupted sleep any effect upon his nerves. That's my opinion of the gentleman. He is either that, or a man of uncommon force and self-restraint."

"I'm inclined to believe him the latter."

"And so give the whole matter the go-by?"

"What do you want? You say the mine is unworkable."

"Yes, in a day, or in a week, possibly in a month. But persistence and a protean adaptability to meet his moods might accomplish something. I don't say will, I only say might. If Sweetwater had the job, with unlimited time in which to carry out any plan he may have, or even for a change of plans to suit a changed idea, success might be his, and both time, effort and outlay justified."

"The outlay? I am thinking of the outlay."

"Mr. Challoner will see to that. I have his word that no reasonable amount will daunt him."

"But this Brotherson is suspicious. He has an inventor's secret to hide, if none other. We can't saddle him with a guy of Sweetwater's appearance and abnormal loquaciousness."

"Not readily, I own. But time will bring counsel. Are you willing to help the boy, to help me and possibly yourself by this venture in the dark? The department shan't lose money by it; that's all I can promise."

"But it's a big one, Gryce, you shall have your way. You'll be the only loser if you fail; and you will fail; take my word for it."

"I wish I could speak as confidently to the contrary, but I can't. I can give you my hand though, inspector, and Sweetwater's thanks. I can meet the boy now. An hour ago I didn't know how I was to do it."

CHAPTER XV.

That's the Question.

"How many times has he seen you?"

"Twice."

"That's unfortunate."

"Damned unfortunate; but one must expect some sort of a handicap in a game like this. Before I'm done with him, he'll look me full in the face and wonder if he's ever seen me before. I wasn't always a detective. I was a carpenter once, as you know, and I'll take to the tools again. As soon as I'm handy with them I'll hunt up lodgings in Hicks street. He may suspect me at first, but he won't long; I'll be such a confounded good workman. I only wish I hadn't such pronounced features. I want to deceive him to his face. He's clever, this same Brotherson, and there's glory to be got in making a fool of him. Do you think it could be done with a beard? I've never worn a beard. While I'm settling back into my old trade, I can let the hair grow."

"Sweetwater! We'd better give the task to another man—to some one Brotherson has never seen and won't be suspicious of?"

"He'll be suspicious of everybody who tries to make friends with him now; only a little more so with me; that's all. But I've got to meet that, and I'll do it by being, temporarily, of course, exactly the man I seem. My health will not be good for the next few weeks, I'm sure of that. But I'll be a model workman, neat and conscientious with just a suspicion of dash where dash is needed. He knows the real thing when he sees it, and there's not a fellow living more alive to shams. I won't be a sham. I'll be it. You'll see."

"But the doubt. Can you do all this in doubt of the issue?"

"No; I must have confidence in the end, and I must believe in his guilt. Nothing else will carry me through. I must believe in his guilt."

"Yes, that's essential."

"And I do. I never was surer of anything than I am of that. But I'll have the deuce of a time to get evidence enough for a grand jury. That's plainly to be seen, and that's why I'm so dead set on the business. It's such an even toss-up."

"I don't call it even. He's got the start of you every way. You can't go to his tenement; the janitor there would recognize you even if he didn't."

"Now I will give you a piece of good news. They're to have a new janitor next week. I learned that yesterday. The present one is too easy. He'll be out long before I'm ready to show myself there; and so will the woman who took care of the poor washerwoman's little child. I'd not have risked her curiosity. Luck isn't all against us. How does Mr. Challoner feel about it?"

"Not very confident; but willing to give you any amount of rope. Sweetwater, he let me have a batch of letters written by his daughter which he found in a secret drawer. They are not to be read, or even opened, unless a great necessity arises. They were written for Brotherson's eye—or so the father says—but she never sent them; too exuberant perhaps. If you ever want them—I cannot give them to you tonight, and wouldn't if I could—don't go to Mr. Challoner—you must never be seen at his hotel—and don't come to me, but to the little house in West Twenty-ninth street, where they will be kept for you, tied up in a package with your name on it. By the way, what name are you going to work under?"

"My mother's—Zugg."

"Good! I'll remember. You can always write or even telephone to Twenty-ninth street. I'm in constant communication with them there, and it's quite safe."

"Thanks. You're sure the superintendent is with me?"

"Yes, but not the inspector. He sees nothing but the victim of a strange coincidence in Orlando Brotherson."

"Again the scales hang even. But they won't remain so. One side is bound to rise. Which? That's the question, Mr. Gryce."

CHAPTER XVI.

Opposed.

There was a new tenant in the Hicks street tenement. He arrived late one afternoon and was shown two rooms, one in the rear building and another in the front one. Both were on the fourth floor. He demurred at the former, thought it gloomy but finally consented to try it. The other, he said, was too expensive. The janitor—new to the business—was not much taken with him and showed it, which seemed to offend the newcomer, who was evidently an irritable fellow owing to ill health.

However, they came to terms as I have said, and the man went away, promising to send in his belongings the next day. He smiled as he said this and the janitor who had rarely seen such a change take place in a human face, looked uncomfortable for a moment and seemed disposed to make some remark about the room they were leaving. But, thinking better of it, locked the door and led the way downstairs. As the prospective tenant followed, he may have noticed, probably did, that the door they had just left was a new one—the only new thing to be seen in the whole shabby place.

The next night that door was locked on the inside. The young man had taken possession. As he put away the remnants of a meal he had cooked for himself, he cast a look at his surroundings, and imperceptibly sighed. Then he brightened again, and sitting down on his solitary chair, he turned his eyes on the window which, uncurtained and without shade, stared open-mouthed, as it were, at the opposite wall rising high across the court.

In that wall, one window only seemed to interest him and that was on a level with his own. The shade of this window was up, but there was no light back of it and so nothing of the interior could be seen. But his eye remained fixed upon it, while his hand, stretched out towards the lamp burning near him, held itself in readiness to lower the light at a minute's notice.

Did he see only the opposite wall and that unillumined window? Was there no memory of the time when, in a previous contemplation of those dismal panes, he beheld stretching between them and himself, a long, low bench with a plain wooden tub upon it, from which a dripping cloth beat out upon the boards beneath a dismal note, monotonous as the ticking of a clock?

One might judge that such memories were indeed his, from the rapid glance he cast behind him at the place where the bed had stood in those days. It was placed differently now.

But if he saw, and if he heard these suggestions from the past, he was not less alive to the exactions of the present, for, as his glance flew back across the court, his finger suddenly moved and the flame it controlled sputtered and went out. At the same instant, the window opposite sprang into view as the lamp was lit within, and for several minutes the whole interior remained visible—the books, the worktable, the cluttered furniture, and, most interesting of all, its owner and occupant. It was upon the latter that the newcomer fixed his attention, and with an absorption equal to that he saw expressed in the countenance opposite.

But his was the absorption of watchfulness; that of the other of introspection. Mr. Brotherson—(we will no longer call him Dunn even here where he is known by no other name)—had entered the room clad in his heavy overcoat and, not having taken it off before lighting his lamp, still stood with it on, gazing eagerly down at the model occupying the place of honor on the large center table. He was not touching it—not at this moment—but that his thoughts were with it, that his whole mind was concentrated on it, was evident to the watcher across the court; and, as this watcher took in this fact and noticed the loving care with which the enthusiastic inventor finally put out his finger to rearrange a thread or twirl a wheel, his disappointment found utterance in a sigh which echoed sadly through the dull and cheerless room. Had he expected this stern and self-contained man to show an open indifference to work and the hopes of a lifetime? If so, this was the first of the many surprises awaiting him.

He was gifted, however, with the patience of an automaton and continued to watch his fellow tenant as long as the latter's shade remained up. When it fell, he rose and took a few steps up and down, but not with the celerity and precision which usually accompanied his movements. Doubt disturbed his mind and impeded his activity. He had caught a fair glimpse of Brotherson's face as he approached the window, and though it continued to show abstraction, it equally displayed serenity and a complete satisfaction with the present if not with the future. Had he mistaken his man after all? Was his instinct, for the first time in his active career, wholly at fault?

He had succeeded in getting a glimpse of his quarry in the privacy of his own room, at home with his thoughts and unconscious of any espionage, and how had he found him? Cheerful, and natural in all his movements.

But the evening was young. Retrospect comes with later and more lonely hours. There will be opportunities yet for studying this impassive countenance under much more telling and productive circumstances than these. He would await these opportunities with cheerful anticipation. Meanwhile, he would keep up the routine watch he had planned for this night. Something might yet occur. At all events he would have exhausted the situation from this standpoint.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Maps Antedate Columbus.

It is said that there are well-authenticated maps showing the coasts of Florida and Cuba, one dated 1414 and the other 1492, before the return of Christopher Columbus from America.